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## Meet the only Jewish mom in a small Texas town

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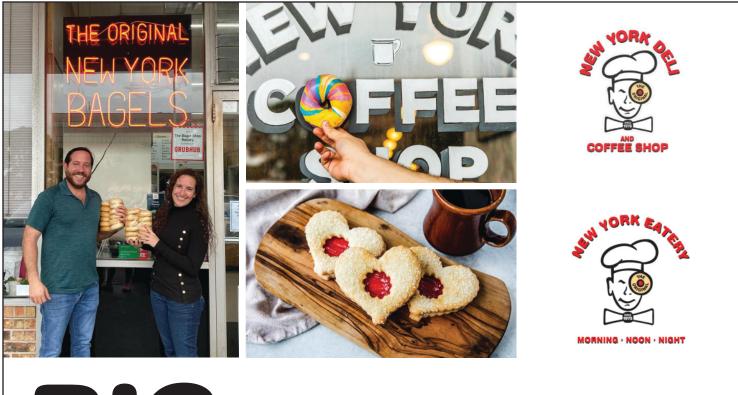
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## **VOICES 2022**

There are so many unique voices in our Jewish community. Every summer, the JHV features many of these in our award-winning magazine. These individuals have made a big impact, not only with what they say, but with what they do.

• Shoshi Kaganovsky dropped everything to volunteer on the front lines of the Ukraine War, helping refugees in Israel, Poland and beyond.

- Nikki Hardesty serves on her city council and directs the county SPCA. And ... she's loud, proud and the only Jewish mom in a small Texas town.
- Daniel Steres, Houston Dynamo defender, is proud of his Jewish roots.
- Phyllis Rosen teaches canasta at the J to find friendship, battle cancer.
- Dr. Stanley Appel is a pioneer in ALS research and treatments.
- Kayla Sokoloff took a roundabout Jewish journey to rediscover her passion for dance.

We hope you enjoy VOICES. Stay safe this summer.



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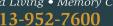
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# Houstonian Volunteers on the Front Lines of War in Ukraine

BY MATT SAMUELS | JHV

n the midst of a destructive war in Ukraine, Houstonian Shoshi Kaganovsky is desperately trying to communicate with a woman who has gone into labor while stuck in a Ukrainian bomb shelter.

Kaganovsky is not a doctor, but her unique skill set – including speaking Ukrainian, Russian and Hebrew – had her working as a translator between an Israeli hospital and Ukrainian families in need.

A week earlier, Kaganovsky was on the ground in Ukraine using her elite training as a former IDF soldier to help redraw maps and redirect hundreds of trucks full of lifesaving supplies that were getting hijacked before reaching refugees.

While many people have helped those affected by the war in Ukraine, Kaganovsky

has taken the task to the next level and beyond.

"Volunteering and helping others is really just in my blood and in my DNA," Kaganovsky told the JHV right after returning to Houston this summer.

"It all began with my grandparents, who were Holocaust survivors and adopted and fostered kids they didn't even know. They would risk themselves for others.

"Helping others is not just a mitzvah, it is so much more than that."

Kaganovsky, 36, volunteered on the war's front lines for six weeks, returning in May with an entirely new perspective on life.

She spent time in Israel, Romania, Poland, Ukraine and Moldova, independently volunteering, at her own expense, for several organizations as a translator, negotiator and logistics and distribution officer.

Kaganovsky used her computer science



Ukrainian refugees visit a Holocaust memorial in Romania on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"It all began with my grandparents, who were Holocaust survivors and adopted and fostered kids they didn't even know. Helping others is not just a mitzvah, it is so much more than that." – Shoshi Kaganovsky

experience in Poland to build a database at a refugee camp that had thousands of children flowing across the border without parents.

"Most of them were orphans who were collected alone in the woods or in the ruins," she said.

"They were between the ages of 2 and 12, and I was supposed to identify them. Most of them were so young, they didn't even know their own last name. It was horrible. It was



Urkrainian refugees reunite.

like post-Holocaust."

In Romania, Kaganovsky volunteered for a Jewish agency helping families go to Israel. She also began teaching an impromptu Hebrew class with 60 refugees.

When she found out refugees being evacuated could not bring their pets with them, Kaganovsky paid thousands of dollars out of her own pocket to allow 45 dogs and cats to escape with their owners.

"I had moved my three dogs from Israel to the U.S. when I moved to Houston, so I was familiar with the process," she said.

"The refugee camp couldn't cover the cost of flying pets and many refugees escaped their homes with just their pets and whatever else they could carry. So, I took care of it – no worries."

Seeing the aftermath of the war from many perspectives, Kaganovsky said she felt Israel was prepared for the refugees.

"They were put in hotels, provided food, had a place to sleep, somewhere to do their laundry," she said. "Every hotel had a coordinator who could speak Russian and Ukrainian. It was really heart-warming to see.

"Israel also set up many places for donations, and people could just come take what



Shoshi Kaganovsky paid thousands of dollars out of her own pocket to allow 45 dogs and cats to escape with their owners.

they needed off the shelf."

Unfortunately, Ukraine was not the same, she said.

e she said.

"The country's infrastructure is not

The situation at the border was unimaginable.

strong, and the war was making it worse,"



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"Men cannot leave Ukraine and a lot of women were raped, just so their family could pass through the border." she said.

"Groups of soldiers on the border are literally taking bribes and sexual favors to let people cross."

Kaganovsky did what she could do to help those seeking refuge.

She opened up her late mother's vacant house in Northern Israel to refugees and purchased luggage and supplies to help others escape the war.



Shoshi Kaganovsky spent six weeks volunteering in Israel, Romania, Poland, Ukraine and Moldova.

Helping others not only is in Kaganovsky's DNA, but has played a big part in her life.

Born in Ukraine, Kaganovsky helped her family immigrate to Israel when she was 5. As the only Hebrew speaker, she was filling out all the family's paperwork as a kindergartner.

"The looks I got were like when Macaulay Culkin went shopping during 'Home Alone.' It was like, 'Little Girl, what are you doing filling out papers for your Holocaust-survivor grandparents?" she said.

After growing up in Israel and serving in the IDF, Kaganovsky continued to build her skill set and began working on many of her entrepreneurial projects.

In 2017, she developed a technology for oil-leak detection and prevention and moved to Houston to commercialize it.

The week she was supposed to arrive in Texas, Hurricane Harvey had other plans.

"I had to fly into Dallas and drive into Houston," she said. "I thought, this is my home now, people are suffering, and I need to come and help. I joined the Red Cross and other organizations and volunteered my first two weeks here."

Eventually, Kaganovsky was settled in her new city and her technology took off in the oil and gas world.

"I hired 26 people and signed huge oil and gas companies on contract," she said. "We won a bunch of awards – best leak-detection system in the world."

Things were going well until the pandemic hit.

"It was chaos," she said. "I held my employees as long as I could – six months – with no income. Suddenly, my entire world collapsed."

The lull gave Kaganovsky time to work on other technologies, including her latest project, RingOn, an audio- and GPS-equipped ring that is designed to help prevent human trafficking.

"For every ring we sell, we will donate a ring to other kids in underserved communities," she said.

"I believe it is our mission as a society to protect all the children, not just those who have parents who can afford to buy a ring."

It was many of the atrocities she witnessed in Ukraine that have her working even harder to stop human trafficking.

"There are horrible things happening over there," she said. "Sometimes, it just takes opening your eyes to the suffering of someone else to see how lucky you are and appreciate it."



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# New Dynamo Defender Proud to Represent his Jewish Traditions

BY MATT SAMUELS | JHV

aniel Steres has made a lot of adjustments this year. New city. New house. New employer.

He and his wife are even expecting their first child later this month.

One thing the newest Houston Dynamo defender and Los Angeles native is still getting used to, however, is the Texas summer heat.

"The weather is definitely an ongoing question that I don't know if I will ever get used to," Steres told the JHV after a hot morning workout. "We had a recent game at 7:30 at night and it still felt like 105 on the field level."

Steres joined the Dynamo this season after spending eight years with the L.A. Galaxy organization.

The 6-foot-tall center back gives Houston a veteran presence on a team that is trying to rebuild itself in Major League Soccer's competitive Western Conference.

Steres also gives the Dynamo its first Jewish soccer player, possibly in franchise history.

"Hopefully, I can be a role model for the Jewish kids that want to make it in sports," Steres said.

Steres grew up in a large Reform Jewish family. He said he enjoyed sharing Shabbat and holidays together.

"We had a lot of traditions that have been passed down," he said. "And, I'd like to continue those traditions as I get older and pass them down to my kid.

"My parents and grandparents have always been the ones leading it in California. Now, it will be more on me to do it out here, which I look forward to doing."

Steres said one of his best Jewish experiences was representing Los Angeles as a teenager in the JCC Maccabi Games. That experience brought him closer to his Judaism and helped boost his soccer career.

Born in Burbank, Calif., Steres graduated from Calabasas High School, before earning a soccer scholarship to San Diego State University where he earned PAC-10 honors and was named team MVP his senior year.

Steres went on to play in the inaugural season for the L.A. Galaxy II, where he was named team captain and Defender of the Year.

"As a center back, I'm pretty calm and try to keep the defense organized," Steres said. "The more I can put people in position, the less I have to do in cleaning up things."

In 2016, Steres moved up to the first-team L.A. Galaxy, where he played in 151 games over the next six seasons.

At the end of the 2021 season, Steres was traded to the Dynamo.

"Having been raised in L.A. and going to school in California and playing for the Galaxy, it was definitely a change," Steres said.

"I can't say we were prepared, but you always have to be ready. You never know when things are going to happen."

Steres has handled the change like a pro.

"For me, it was just trying to bring the experience I have being in the league for a while," he said. "It's a younger group of guys here, and I try to use my leadership on and off the field and pass on some things I've learned throughout the years, as well as continue developing my game to help get this team where we want to be."

"Hopefully, I can be a role model for the Jewish kids that want to make it in sports." – Daniel Steres

Steres has embraced the new franchise and even served as the face of the Dynamo's July Jewish Heritage Night.

"We've enjoyed Houston so far," he said. "We are settling into our new house, getting into the community a little bit and checking out what the city has to offer.

"It is similar in some ways to Los Angeles – it's a massive, diverse city that offers a lot of good things. People have been very friendly, food has been good, and there are a lot of activities."

As for the heat?

"I think we have acclimated a little bit, but it's definitely different," Steres said. "We train



in the morning, but it is still pretty hot.

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# A Lone Jewish Family in a Small Texas Town

She serves on the city council. She directs the county SPCA. She raises dogs, cats, rabbits and multiple peacocks. And ... she's loud, proud and the only Jewish mom in town.



Nikki Hardesty and her daughter, Sierra, are the only Jewish residents of Jones Creek, Texas – population 2,050 – which sits about 60 miles south of Houston in Brazoria County.

#### BY MATT SAMUELS | JHV

very December, the small Texas town of Jones Creek decorates 70 trees outside City Hall to show off its residents' holiday spirit.

Standing out amongst the sea of red and green is one lone sapling, dressed in blueand-white Chanukah flair.

Nikki Hardesty, and her daughter Sierra, are the only two Jewish residents of Jones Creek, which has a population of 2,050. The town sits about 60 miles south of Houston in Brazoria County.

"Most people here have never met a Jewish person until they meet us," Nikki told the JHV.

"Diversity is important, and we are able

to educate our community in a positive way."

Nikki, 50, is not only the lone Jewish adult in town, but quite possibly one of the busiest and most interesting residents of Jones Creek.

Nikki serves as an alderwoman on the city council (and was just a few votes short of becoming mayor on May 7), is director of the Brazoria County SPCA and is working on her master's degree in Shelter Medicine.

If that isn't enough, Nikki – along with her husband, Tim – share their home with seven dogs, multiple cats, plenty of rabbits and at least three peacocks.

"We are just an animal family and have a little farm," Nikki said. "When we bought

our house, the gentleman we bought it from had peacocks and they just stayed. We love them."

Despite the busy schedule, Nikki and Sierra, 14, still make their Judaism a centerpoint of their lives.

The two travel an hour to attend services at Congregation Beth El in Missouri City, where they have been very active, from Nikki serving on the education committee to both of them helping plan the Purim *shpiel*.

Sierra just celebrated her Bat Mitzvah in March.

Beth El spiritual leader Cantor Renee Waghalter has gotten to know the family well over the years and has admired Nikki's work ethic.



Sierra and Nikki Hardesty visit with their dogs and one of their peacocks (below) in their spacious yard in Jones Creek, Texas. Sierra was a recent Bat Mitzvah at Congregation Beth El in Fort Bend County.

"I simply don't know anyone busier than she is," Cantor Waghalter told the JHV. "She's amazing and one of the kindest, most helpful, most creative and savviest people you'll ever meet.

"She is doing Jewish in an unlikely place."

So, what brought a nice Jewish lady from Long Island, N.Y., to Jones Creek, Texas?

"In 2004, I decided I needed a change of pace and moved to Louisiana," Nikki said. "Then, I met my husband, who is from Jones Creek. I just fell in love with the sleepy little town and said, 'Let's go!'

"We sold my Louisiana house and moved to Jones Creek, where I've been for 13 years."

Jones Creek is best known for being the homestead of Stephen F. Austin, who still has descendants in the area.

"It's a great, quiet town that likes to do a lot of community activities," Nikki said.

"We have Jones Creek Pie Day, where we have locals come and bake pies and compete in eight different categories for prizes, ribbons and bragging rights. Then, people get a plate and a fork and eat as much of any pie as they want."

Although she loves baking, dogs always



have been Nikki's passion.

"I started off showing dogs in the '90s, showed Bullmastiff and Chinese Shar Peis and bred both breeds and had a lot of success. I had Westminster winners and top winning dogs in the nation."

When Sierra was born in 2008, Nikki had to step back from showing nationally and, instead, focused on local animal welfare. She served on the board of the SPCA for a few years before becoming the director two years ago.

During the pandemic, Nikki finished her bachelor's degree online in Health Service

Management and is working online on her master's degree in Shelter Medicine through the University of Florida.

As if raising a daughter, caring for animals and continuing her education wasn't enough, Nikki decided to get involved in politics.

"I tend to have strong opinions about things and I like to be involved," Nikki said. "If I see something not right, I want to be there to help fix it."

The turning point in her decision to become active politically was when Jones Creek flooded during Hurricane Harvey. The city's

drainage had been neglected for so many years, Nikki said, and she wanted to see tax dollars go toward improvements.

"We are right on Jones Creek – that's our name – but we are also between the Brazos River and the San Bernard and we are 8 miles from the Gulf," Nikki said.

"I've enjoyed being involved and helping the city get to where it needs to be. We are such a small community, and there is industry coming up around us and we really need to stay up with the times, or the industry is going to swallow us and none of us want that. We want to remain a

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small community that is tucked away and left to itself."

In 2022, Nikki decided to run for mayor.

"I saw some things that maybe need to go another way," she said. "I have a lot of managerial skills and experience working in a nonprofit, and I know how to take care of the money of taxpayers and donors.

"I think I can do a good job maintaining our budget and still meeting the needs of our community by looking for grants and being very wise about how we spend our tax dollars."

Nikki lost the election by 68 votes but continues to serve as a city alderwoman.

While being the only Jewish family in town makes life interesting, Nikki said she and Sierra have never faced any antisemitism from the community.

"There were a lot more negative experiences in New York," Nikki said. "Here, everyone has been welcoming and wonderful and we love this community.

"Both of us are very proud to be Jewish and my daughter has really taken that pride to the next level. Her Jewish upbringing is very important to me. I just feel she needs to be deep rooted in her religion and her heritage and traditions."



The nearby Brazos River in Jones Creek, Texas.

Sierra often teaches kids in school about Jewish traditions, while the family hosts a Passover Seder and Chanukah party at their house every year.

"There are usually more Christians than Jews, but that is OK," Nikki said. "They all learn something and connect to us in a different way. It's been a pleasure for Sierra and me to educate everyone." And, that lesson is on full display outside City Hall every December.

"The town decorates all these trees for Christmas, but I always do mine with Chanukah decorations," Nikki said. "We tie ribbons around cinnamon sticks and have blue and white lights. Everyone loves my Chanukah tree and it's a great way to show our Jewish pride.

"Our Jewish values play a big part in our daily life. It's who we are, not what we are."☆



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Phyllis Rosen helps a table full of ladies learn how to play Canasta at the ERJCC.

ALL PHOTOS BY RENE ALVAREZ

## Teaching canasta helps senior find friendship, battle cancer

BY JUDY BLUESTEIN LEVIN | JHV

hyllis Rosen, 89, loves a good game. When she's not playing canasta or mah-jongg, she's playing Wordle with friends or doing The New York Times crossword puzzle. So, when she relocated to Houston from Dayton, Ohio, nine months ago, her daughter, Lori Rubin, knew she needed games in her life.

"I was anxious to play. But nobody was interested," said Rosen.

Rosen, who has been battling two active cancers and surgery that left her in rehab for four months, needed the distraction that only a good hand of canasta could provide.

"I called the J to see if anyone played canasta there," said Rubin, who remodeled her home to accommodate her mom. But, currently no one was playing canasta – Rosen's favorite card game.

Judy Weil, Adult Programming coordinator for the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center, answered Rubin's call. Canasta wasn't on Weil's radar. Then, by happenstance, Lori Jacobs, who had just moved to Houston from Florida to be near her granddaughter and great-grandchildren, was looking to join a canasta game.



Lori Jacobs and Phyllis Rosen have taught close to 60 people how to play canasta at the ERJCC.

Was this a resurgence of the game played 50 years ago?

Intrigued, Weil sent out a group email. In it she asked, "What is your game?"

"I had this overwhelming response," Weil told the JHV.

To her delight, dozens expressed interest in canasta – but they didn't know how to play.

"Many baby boomers have fond memories of their grandparents playing it when they were young, and some have told me their grandparents taught them how to play," said Weil.

Jacobs loved the reaction. "Judy, G-d bless her, didn't have an experienced player, but she sent out an email and there was a torrent of people wanting us to teach them how to play," said Jacobs, who wrote a small book containing canasta rules for the students.

Next, Weil called a meeting to introduce Rosen to Jacobs and ask if they would teach the game. The answer was a resounding yes. From February through the beginning of June, nearly 60 people have learned to play canasta at the J. Several classes later, they have a cadre of people with whom they can play.

"It's all been word of mouth," said Weil. "I didn't want to charge people for the classes. Lori and Phyllis were so gracious and offering their time to teach. So, it was kind of a win-win. They could teach people to master a game they love and thereby create a pool of people who they can then play with after they learned – because they really wanted to play canasta.

"Because I had a huge waiting list, I needed to find at least two more instructors, and my search led me to Rhonda Glick, who recommended Irene Pearlman, who also graciously donated their time," said Weil.

Now that so many have mastered the rudiments of the game, it was up to Weil to create a time and a place where the group could play. The J now has two days a week with open play. Each session averages six tables of four players.

"And, there's an energy in the room when I go into the Senior Lounge when it's filled with all the canasta players," said Weil. "There's just a really wonderful, wonderful



Clockwise from left, Leda Karchmer, Arlene Karchmer, Geraldine Woolf and Barbara Mandelstein enjoy canasta at the ERJCC.

energy in there."

While the women play, they answer questions and make suggestions. The players are novices, but Rosen noted that they are getting it. "They're all catching on to it. This is wonderful because they're looking at their cards with meaning. It's very fulfilling," said Rosen.

"I will continue to teach because I just love being with people and enjoy them lighting up when they get it - that's the best part," said Rosen, beaming.

More than a game, canasta is a way to reconnect after COVID and other illnesses. Both Rosen and Jacobs, in part, moved across the country to be with family after the forced isolation created by the illness.

Days after arriving in Houston, Jacobs had to have a knee replacement, and she said to herself, I can't just sit here. I need community.

"I have always worked at home, so I work by myself, but somehow COVID made everything much lonelier," said Jacobs. "I didn't really have many friends in Florida, and I didn't have any family, and I felt like I needed to be near family. I came here and then the JCC has become a family."

Weil sees that, too. "I get phone calls all the time from concerned adult children look-



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"Additionally, the COVID cocooning – as I call it – has impacted everyone and, for the older demographic, particularly those who were living alone and not accustomed to the isolation, realized how important family and friends were," said Weil.

"I love the fact it brings the community together. People are playing with people they've never met before. And, I'm getting to know people I couldn't find on my own," said Rosen, who now has a new pal in Jacobs.

"We've become friends," said Jacobs. "We've gone to the movies, we lunch together. We talk, and we taught the classes together."

"It is these kinds of personal, human connections that are more valuable than anything," said Weil.

"Both Phyllis and Lori are very social and enjoy being with people," said Weil, who considers herself a bit of a yenta. "This was a match made in heaven."

"What I am doing is forging a community, and I'm making a life for myself – that, at 80 years old. I wasn't so sure that I could do," confided Jacobs. "But, I find I can do just about anything that I used to do."

"In the meantime," said Rubin, "Mom's treatments are completed, and she is cancer-free and thriving. Her activity in the community, and opportunity to meet so many people, surely played a role in this."

"And everywhere I go," said Rubin, "people tell me, 'I'm learning canasta with your mother.""



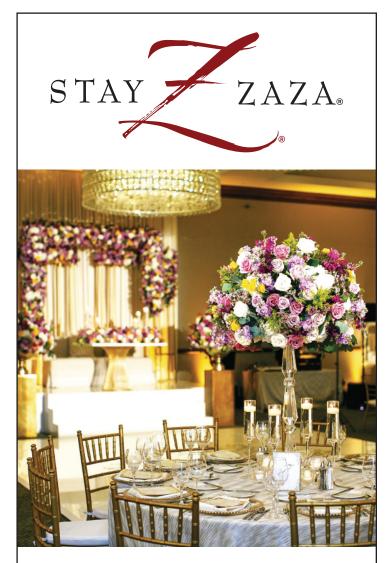
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# **Dr. Stanley Appel:** A pioneer in ALS research and treatment

BY AARON HOWARD | JHV

r. Stanley H. Appel has devoted more than six decades studying how the human brain works and clinically treating neurodegenerative diseases. These diseases include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease) that occur when nervous system cells in the brain and spinal cord become dysfunctional.

In June, the Muscular Dystrophy Association presented Dr. Appel with the MDA Tribute Award to celebrate the 40th anniversary of what is now the Houston Methodist Neurological Institute's MDA ALS Research and Clinical Center. Established here in 1982 by Dr. Appel, the center was the first multidisciplinary clinic dedicated to ALS patient care and research in the United States.

ALS is a progressive neuromuscular disease that destroys muscle-controlling nerve cells, called motor neurons. As nerve cells become nonfunctional, the muscles they control become weak and then nonfunctional. Although each person experiences a unique disease course, the hallmark of ALS is progressive muscle weakness.

In early stages, ALS patients experience muscle weakness, cramping and/or twitching, often in arms and hands. Gradually, the muscle weakness gets worse and spreads to other parts of the body. A person will lose the ability to walk, to use their arms and hands, to control their saliva, and to swallow and speak.

In the late stages of ALS, most of a person's voluntary muscles will become paralyzed. The person no longer will be able to eat, speak or breathe on their own. They will require a feeding tube and a ventilator for these tasks.

Some people with ALS never will develop changes in thinking or behavior. For others, there will be mild to moderate changes in how they think or behave. However, most still are able to think independently and make informed decisions about their care.

Currently, there is no cure for ALS. Approved therapies only mildly slow the progression of the disease.

ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease, was named



Dr. Stanley H. Appel

after the New York Yankees Hall of Fame baseball star who played in 2,130 consecutive professional baseball games prior to being diagnosed with the disease.

Understanding how the human brain works is an incredible challenge, Dr. Appel told the JHV.

"I still haven't solved the problem of the brain, the totality that describes how we think and feel. In my career, I've focused on a number of neurodegenerative diseases. What most fascinates me is how to solve the unmet needs of my patients afflicted by these diseases," said Dr. Appel.

He elaborated, "As a research physician, you can understand the complexity of the problem. As a clinician, I can understand the needs of my patients."

He calls ALS "the nice guys' disease."

"Most of my patients are referrals. They've been on the internet and what often appears about the disease is a real downer. After establishing the diagnosis, we discuss that there is currently no cure. We go through the emotional, as well as the physical challenges of ALS. And, we go through the steps of showing patients what they can do and how we can help them achieve a quality of life.

"With ALS, the body wastes away. In contrast, Alzheimer's patients aren't aware of the devastation the disease is causing their families. Yet, ALS patients are aware. When you see the courage of these individuals, it's amazing. Patients with ALS are, in general, the most courageous people you'll find.

"The outcome – the fact that they are more concerned about how you're doing than they are when we meet. That is unique among diseases," he said.

Dr. Appel describes himself as the firstgeneration product of two immigrant families. His father, Joseph, came to the U.S. from the town of Korets. Currently part of Ukraine, Korets formerly was part of Russia. The majority of the town's population was Jewish until the community was annihilated by the Nazis in 1942.

A history of the community can be found in "Korets (Wolyn) Sefer Zikaron" or the Korets Memory Book.

"I was reared in a household where intellectual pursuits were always supported," Appel said. "I went to Boston Latin, which was the oldest public high school in the U.S. and always one of the top academic high schools. Those of us who graduated usually went on to scholarships at schools like Harvard."

At Harvard, Appel majored in business, not pre-med. He even earned an M.B.A. at Harvard.

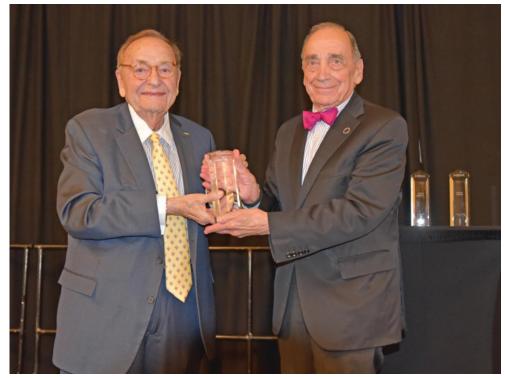
"Business seemed a little anti-intellectual to me," recalled Appel, "but what did I know at age 22?"

After initially taking a job as a management consultant, Appel decided to switch to medicine and began taking pre-med courses. He obtained his medical degree at Columbia University where he met Dr. Murray Bornstein, renowned physician and neurological researcher in multiple sclerosis.

"Murray instilled an appreciation of the rigors of the scientific method. At this point in my life, I've learned that I'm persistent, and resilient, as well. That's important because, as we all know, it's not how many times you get knocked down. It's how many times you get up."

In 2019, the ALS Association, ALS Finding a Cure (ALSFAC), and MDA jointly awarded a \$2.5 million clinical trial grant to Dr. Appel and his team of researchers at the Houston Methodist Neurological Institute and to Dr. Merit Cudkowicz and his team at Massachusetts General Hospital. The grant allows Dr. Appel to expand Phase 1 of his study of an immunotherapy treatment that could slow or stop the progression of ALS.

Dr. Appel and his team discovered that a key component that accelerates ALS progression is the breakdown of regulatory T



Dr. Rodney Howell presents Dr. Stanley Appel with the MDA Tribute Award earlier this year.

cells, also known as Tregs. Regulatory T cells are immune cells that help protect the body from harmful inflammation by suppressing immune response. Dr. Appel found many of his ALS patients not only had low levels of Tregs, but also that their Tregs were not functioning properly.

In Phase 1 of the study, the research team removed blood from eight ALS patients, via leukapheresis. This is a laboratory procedure in which white blood cells are separated from the red blood cells in a patient's blood. Once the white blood cells were outside the body, the number of each patient's Tregs increased in vitro. The Tregs then were returned into the patients.

The results suggest that autologous passive transfer of expanded Tregs might offer a novel cellular therapy to slow disease progression. The Phase II study will consist of randomized, placebo-controlled trials to test clinical efficacy, safety and tolerability of different doses of Tregs.

Family members and caregivers caring for people with ALS may experience increasing levels of frustration as the patient's abilities diminish. They may benefit from supportive counseling, support groups, spiritual counseling, or increasing their own focus on taking care of themselves so that they have more resources to offer the person with ALS.

"Watching people endure the wasting of their muscle control and seeing them defiant in the face of a sure and steady loss of communication and independence makes me defiant, too," said Appel. "Our team puts that inspiration to work in the clinic and in my lab, where we are on a promising path to finding effective therapies to slow ALS." ✿



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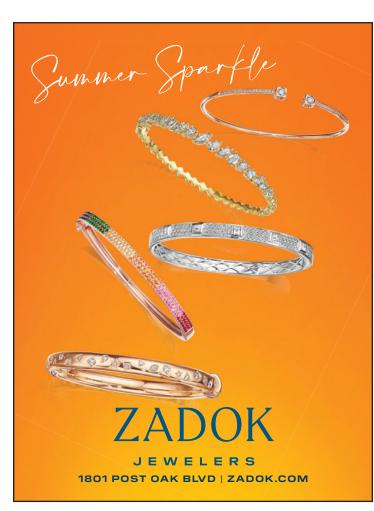
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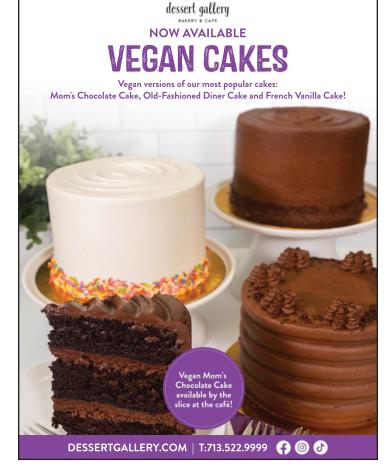


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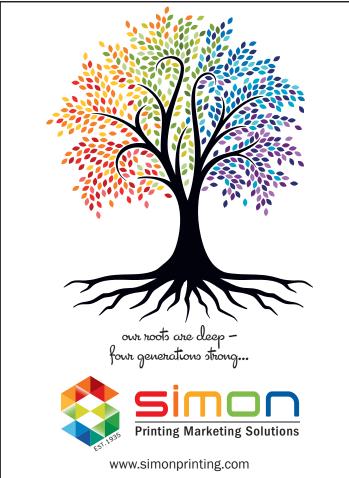
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The Dulles High School Dulles Dolls dance team.

# Dance Team Leader Takes Roundabout Journey to Rediscover Her Passion

BY MATT SAMUELS | JHV

Ver since she was young, Kayla Sokoloff knew she wanted to be working in the dance world.

What she didn't know was how many extra steps and dance moves it would take to get there.

Sokoloff's journey has taken her from Sugar Land to Austin to Washington, D.C., and has included ankle surgery, a career change and a whole bunch of determination.

Now, more than a decade after she shined as a team captain of the Dulles High School Dulles Dolls dance team, Sokoloff has returned to her alma mater as the dance director.

"In kind of a crazy way, everything just lined up," Sokoloff told the JHV. "Twelve years after I graduated, I'm back where I started. I definitely took a roundabout journey."

After graduating high school in 2011, Sokoloff went to The University of Texas to major in dance.

After one semester, however, she realized dance in college is very academic, but not as competitive as she would have liked.

Sokoloff also was having physical issues with her ankle, eventually necessitating surgery.

The recovery gave Sokoloff time to examine her future.

"That first winter break I said to myself, 'I am at the best university in Texas and there are so many other opportunities to learn other things," she said.



Kayla Sokoloff was one of the Dulles Dolls team captains in 2011.

"At that point, all I knew was dance and this was my wake-up call that there may be other avenues I could explore."

Sokoloff began to become involved in Hillel and Chabad on campus. Then came an opportunity to intern at Hillel International in Washington for the summer after her freshman year.

"That very much changed my trajectory," Sokoloff said.

"I've been very one track – I get very passionate about things and I think, as the passion for dance was getting pushed to the side a bit, I increased my passion for Jewish communal work, and that became my focus."

After graduating UT with a history degree, Sokoloff earned a coveted job with the Bronfman Fellowship, moving to D.C. to work in the office of the president of Hillel International.

Sokoloff helped Hillel start its international student board. She led a Birthright



Kayla Sokoloff is now the 2022 Dulles Dolls director.

trip to Israel and enjoyed many eye-opening experiences.

"I got a real bird's-eye view at what goes on at an international nonprofit," Sokoloff said. "I'm super grateful for that experience."

Sokoloff was big on social justice and then started working for the URJ's Religious Action Center. She worked in fundraising, but her role was more behind the scenes and she said she needed to be more of a people person.

With a degree in history and government, Sokoloff decided to move back to Texas and become a teacher. After becoming certified, she accepted the first interview she went on, teaching history in Houston ISD. In her new role, she said her Jewish values helped shape who she was as a teacher.

"Most of my kids in HISD were from other countries and had never met a Jewish person," she said. "Everyone assumes I'm Christian when they meet me as their teacher for the first time.

"One of my missions is to be a representative to those that haven't met Jews. Around the holidays, I always put up Chanukah stuff and talk about it. I am very loud, proud and Jewish.

"I always felt that if they had a positive interaction with me, they would think positively of the Jewish people."

After two years of teaching history in HISD, Sokoloff felt a calling from an old love.

"I knew what I really was supposed to be doing was teaching dance," she said.

So, when the assistant director job opened up at her former school, Sokoloff



Kayla Sokoloff with former director Rachel Caldwell.

jumped at the opportunity.

"It really felt like *bashert* or fate when I applied for the position at my old high school," she said.

Sokoloff helped co-lead the Dulles Dolls, which performs and competes on many different levels, from football halftime shows to competitions around the state.

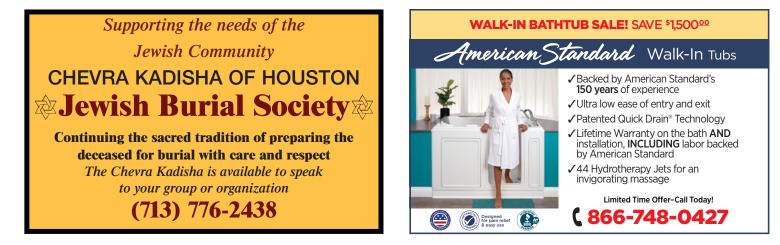
"Dance is a mixing of the artist and the athlete – that is a guiding principle for me," Sokoloff said. "It is a creative, athletic outlet."

At the end of the 2022 school year, the head director left and recommended Sokoloff for the job.

"For the last three years, I was able to make an impact on the program, but also learn," Sokoloff said. "Now, I know the kids, and I am confident in the direction I want to take the program.

"I have a hard work ethic and I'm really competitive and I push that on the kids. I teach them accountability, responsibility and work ethic – working through grit."

Sokoloff sees that the experiences she had in Austin, D.C. and Houston ISD have helped her become the person she is today.





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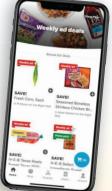
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